

**RECEIVED
CENTRAL FAX CENTER****FEB 23 2007****REMARKS**

This is in response to the Office Action dated December 14, 2006. In view of the foregoing amendments and following representations, reconsideration is respectfully requested.

Initially, in response to the rejection of claims 18-32 under 35 U.S.C. 112, second paragraph, claim 18 has been amended to replace "rod-like products" with the language —elongated products—. The rejection corrects an obvious informality and clearly overcomes the rejection under 35 U.S.C. 112, second paragraph.

Next, on page 9 of the Office Action, the Examiner indicates that claims 25, 29, 31 and 32 would be allowable if rewritten to overcome the rejection under 35 U.S.C. 112, second paragraph and to include all of the limitations of the base claim and any intervening claims. Accordingly, in order to place the application in condition for allowance, the limitations of allowable claim 25 have been incorporated into claim 18. Also, claim 29 has been rewritten in independent form by incorporating the limitations of base claim 18 and intervening claim 29. Claim 31 has been rewritten in independent form by incorporating the limitations of base claim 18 and intervening claims 28 and 30. The remaining claims ultimately depend from one of the allowable independent claims, and are therefore allowable at least by virtue of their dependencies. Due to the above amendments, claims 25, 28, 30, 33 and 34 have been cancelled.

In view of the above, it is submitted that the present application is now clearly in condition for allowance. The Examiner therefore is requested to enter the above amendment and pass this case to issue.

In the event that the Examiner has any comments or suggestions of a nature necessary to place this case in condition for allowance, then the Examiner is requested to contact Applicant's undersigned attorney by telephone to promptly resolve any remaining matters.

Respectfully submitted,

Toshio OKUYAMA et al.

By: Michael S. Huppert
Michael S. Huppert
Registration No. 40,268
Attorney for Applicants

MSH/kjf
Washington, D.C. 20006-1021
Telephone (202) 721-8200
Facsimile (202) 721-8250
February 23, 2007